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ABSTRACT

The achievements and fictional exploits of Davy (or David) Crockett have entered the American imagination--it is difficult to distinguish what he did and said from what has been attributed to him. And it is also difficult to discuss the influence of the frontier on the American temperament without reference to David Crockett. This lesson plan explores what made Davy Crockett so famous during his lifetime and why his legend looms so large; it also examines tall tale characters and locations which are based on actual people and places. The lesson plan contains material on how to prepare to teach the lesson. It also contains suggested activities for the following lessons: Lesson 1: Two Tall Tales; Lesson 2: He's Alive! He's Alive! The Historical David Crockett; Lesson 3: A Million More Tall Tales; Lesson 4: Spinning Some New Tales; and Extending the Lesson. The lesson plan provides information and ideas for teaching each lesson; cites learning objectives; gives appropriate grade levels (Grades 3-5) and time required for each lesson; and outlines national standards for social studies and English/language arts covered in the lesson plan. Lists helpful Web sites and several other resources. (NKA)



Born on a Mountaintop? Davy Crockett, Tall Tales, and History. [Lesson Plan].

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SEARCH

SUBJECT CATALOGUE WEBSITES LESSON PLANS REFERENCE SHELF TEACHERS' LOUNGE ABOUT EDSITEMENT



Davy Crockett

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Born on a Mountaintop? Davy Crockett, Tall Tales, and History

Born on a mountaintop in Tennessee, Greenest state in the land of the free, Raised in the woods so he knew every tree, Kilt him a b'ar when he was only 3. Davy, Davy Crockett, King of the wild frontier! From "The Ballad of Davy Crockett" Theme of the Disneyland TV Production of "Davy Crockett"

"First make sure you're right, then go ahead." Attributed to David Crockett

Introduction

He was born in a small cabin beside the banks of the Nolichucky River, not on a mountaintop. He did not kill a bear when he was only three. He was called David, not Davy. But his achievements and fictional exploits have entered the American imagination. It's difficult to distinguish what he did and said from what has been attributed to him; it's also difficult to discuss the influence of the frontier on the American temperament without reference to David Crockett.

In 1834, A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett, of the State of Tennessee was published, followed by a series of popular pamphlets known as Crockett Almanacs. David Crockett, United States Representative from Tennessee, already a folk hero in his home state, became one of the most famous men in the nation. More than a century later, in 1955, "The Ballad of Davy Crockett" was the No. 1 song in the nation for weeks, and sales of Davy Crockett items grossed \$100 million. Coonskin caps were worn not only by young boys, but also by adults like presidential candidate Estes Kefauver, who sported one at numerous public appearances.

SUBJECT AREAS >

History/US-The West

Literature/Biography

Art/Folklore

GRADE LEVELS >

3-5

TIME REQUIRED >

Lesson 1: 1 class period Lesson 2: 1 or 2 class periods

Lesson 3: 1 class period Lesson 4: 1 period to introduce the assignment; additional time, as needed for students to complete their stories

SKILLS >

- primary document analysis
- literary analysis
- creative writing

STANDARDS ALIGNMEDT > **National Council for** the Social Studies

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What made David Crockett one of the most famous Americans during his lifetime? Why did his legend still loom so large in the American imagination long after his death? In what ways is he typical of the heroes of the tall tales that sprang up during the first half of the 19th century?

Learning Objectives

After completing the lessons in this unit, students will be able to:

- Name tall tale characters and locations, which are based on actual people and places, and describe how they are used in an exaggerated way.
- · Name created characters and events from tall tales.
- List some of the literary characteristics of tall tales.
- Write a tall tale.

Guiding Questions: What are the characteristics of tall tales? How do they reflect the historical moment? Who was David Crockett and why did he, and others like him, become important figures in American frontier history?

Preparing to Teach This Lesson

- Review the lessons in this unit. Select from suggested archival materials in the various lessons that you will use in your classroom discussions.
 Bookmark them, if practical; download and print out the archival documents you select and duplicate copies as necessary for student viewing.
- The culminating activity in this unit is the student creation of tall tales. Such tales are built by combining the fictional element of exaggeration with historical elements of nostalgia about the past and anxiety about the future. John Henry, for example, accomplishes superhuman feats but ultimately cannot stop the changes the steam drill will bring to his profession. Mike Fink works, fights and brags his way up and down the river, but ultimately keel boatmen disappear as steamboats become omnipresent.

In the first half of the 19th century, America was undergoing rapid change. Would the frontier spirit, closely associated with the American character at the time, disappear with the frontier itself? Tall tales harked back to an era of rugged individualism. What is gained and what is lost when a frontier disappears?

During the late 20th century, America was once again undergoing rapid change. Who could be our contemporary tall tale heroes?

As an example of a literary genre, tall tales will exhibit some of the following characteristics, to which you should introduce your students ahead of time in list format:

- The main character accomplishes great feats using strength, skill and wits
- 2. The main character is helped by a powerful object or animal.
- The story starts when the hero is a child (e.g., Pecos Bill falls off a wagon and is adopted by wolves, Davy Crockett kills a bear at age three).
- The author uses exaggeration and humor; the hero brags but also makes fun of him/herself.
- 5. The story explains how some familiar things began (e.g., Pecos Bill

2. Time, Continuity, and Change (<u>more</u>)

NCTE/IRA List of Standards for the English Language Arts

- 2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods In many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g. philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience. (MOTE)
- Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret evaluate, and appreciate texts. (<u>more</u>)

View your state's standards



- invents the lariat and creates the Grand Canyon).
- 6. The hero has a colorful way of speaking.
- The hero has one or more companions (e.g., Pecos Bill's wife, Mike Fink's friends, Johnny Appleseed's animals).
- 8. Famous people and places show up in the story.
- 9. The hero has problems with nature, people and/or progress.
- 10. The hero tries hard to be a good person but sometimes fails.
- 11. The hero does not like what others call progress (e.g., the steamboat spells the end of the keel boatmen in the story of Mike Fink, the tall tale hero moves because of a neighbor five miles away). More often than not, the hero dies or disappears.
- The Digital Classroom, available through EDSITEment, offers a series of worksheets for analyzing primary source documents, including written documents and photographs, that you may wish to use or adapt to help students in reviewing the materials presented in this unit.

Suggested Activities

Lesson 1: Two Tall Tales
Lesson 2: He's Alive! He's Alive!: The Historical David Crockett
Lesson 3: A Million More Tall Tales
Lesson 4: Spinning Some New Yarns
Extending the Lesson

LESSON 1

Two Tall Tales

Ask your students how many have heard of Davy Crockett. What "facts" do they know about him? How many of the students believe Crockett was a real historical figure? How many believe he is a fictional character?

The students will now hear or read a tall tale about Davy Crockett from a source such as American Tall Tales by Adrien Stoutenburg (Puffin Books, 1976). (Note: Several print resources on tall tales are listed under Other Resources at the end of this unit.) Next, lead the students in a discussion of the "tall" elements of the story and the elements that might have a basis in history. Based on the discussion, create a chart of characteristic elements of tall tales that students will use to analyze other tall tales they encounter in this unit.

Share with the students "Big Fred Tells a Tall Tale," which you will find on the EDSITEment resource American Memory by searching for the title. "Big Fred" is a tall tale from a more recent era—the title indicates it is a tall tale, and Big Fred even mentions Paul Bunyan, another tall tale hero. What literary elements are present in this tale? What exaggerations are present in the tale? What historical elements (labor disputes, for example) do students notice? Do the students consider Big Fred's story a tall tale? As students discuss these stories, refine the list of tall tale characteristics as desired.

LESSON 2

He's Alive! He's Alive!: The Historical David Crockett

David Crockett lived. He *was* born in Tennessee; he *did* die at the Alamo. But even these events have become clouded by the tales, some created by the publicity machine of an ambitious man, that have grown up around Crockett, a potential candidate for President of the United States.

Share with the class the <u>brief biography of Crockett's life</u> available on <u>Encarta</u>, a link from the EDSITEment resource <u>The Internet Public Library</u>. If desired, use a map to help the class understand the location of Tennessee, Alabama (where Crockett fought in the War of 1812), Washington, D.C., and Texas.

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Discuss briefly what elements in Crockett's life made him a good candidate to be the hero of tall tales in the 1830s.

The students have read a tall tale about Crockett and they have read a brief biography. Now, they can analyze some documents to determine whether they are factual, tall tales or a combination of the two. Working in small groups with a strong reader in each, students should attempt to answer the following about each document:

- Does the document seem factual or is it an exaggeration?
- Is the author simply trying to be factual or to enhance or demean Crockett's reputation?
- Is the portrayal of Crockett that comes through in the document consistent with the historical Crockett? The tall tale Crockett?

Select from these or other documents related to Crockett:

 "Death of David Crockett" (The Century, Volume 32, Issue 6, Oct. 1886), available on the EDSITEment-reviewed <u>American Memory</u> by searching for the title.

Excerpt:

Death of David Crockett.

CAPTAIN REUBEN M. POTTER, U. S. A., writing to correct some statements in an account of the fall of the Alamo that appeared in an article on General Sam Houston, in THE CENTURY for August, 1884, states that Crockett was killed by a bullet shot while at his post on the outworks of the fort, and was one of the first to fall. Captain Potter says that the story of Crockett being captured with a gun barrel in one hand, and a huge knife in the other, and a semicircle of dead Mexicans about him is pure fiction. Bowie was ill at the time of the fight, and was found murdered in his bed; and a single bullet-hole in the forehead of Travis tells the whole tale of his death. Nothing else, he adds, can be known.

<u>Target Shooting</u>, from "Life of David Crockett" (1860), located on
 <u>American Studies at the University of Virginia</u>, a link from the EDSITEment
 resource <u>History Matters</u>. Have your students look at the entire text, or
 this excerpt which starts after Crockett has won a shooting contest. He
 reluctantly agrees to a second, more difficult contest. He misses the target
 completely, but he's prepared himself for such a possibility. What did he
 do?

Excerpt:

When it came to my turn, I squared myself, and turning to the prime shot, I gave him a knowing nod, by way of showing my confidence; and says I, "Look out for the bull's eye, stranger." I blazed away, and I wish I may be shot if I didn't miss the target. They examined it all over, and could find neither hair nor hide of my bullet, and pronounced it a dead miss; when says I, "Stand aside and let me look, and I warrant you I get on the right trail of the critter." They stood aside, and I examined the bull's eye pretty particular, and at length cried out, "Here it is; there is no snakes if it ha'n't followed the very track of the other." They said it was utterly impossible, but I insisted on their searching the hole, and I agreed to be stuck up as a mark myself, if they did not find two bullets there. They searched for my satisfaction, and sure enough it all come out just as I had told them; for I had picked up a bullet



that had been fired, and stuck it deep into the hole, without any one perceiving it.

(*Note:* It is difficult to know how much Crockett contributed to works attributed to him. Your students should probably be aware of this. According to <u>American Studies at the University of Virginia</u>:

A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett (1834) is the autobiography most likely to be the actual work of Crockett; edited by Thomas Chilton. Much of the other writing attributed to Crockett was actually penned by ghost writers (presumably due to Crockett's lack of formal education) and was approved by Crockett before publication.)

 Crockett's Rules for the Guidance of Politicians, from "Life of David Crockett" (1860), located on <u>American Studies at the University of Virginia</u>, a link from the EDSITEment resource <u>History Matters</u>.

Have your students look at the entire text, or this excerpt:

"When the day of election approaches, visit your constituents far and wide. Treat liberally, and drink freely, in order to rise in their estimation though you fall in your own. True, you may be called a drunken dog by some of the clean shirt and silk stocking gentry, but the real rough necks will style you a jovial fellow, their votes are certain, and frequently, count double. Do all you can to appear to advantage in the eyes of the women. That's easily done—you have but to kiss and slabber their children, wipe their noses, and pat them on the head; this cannot fail to please their mothers, and you may rely on your business being done in that quarter.

"Promise all that is asked," said I, "and more if you can think of up thing. Offer to build a bridge or a church, to divide a county, create a batch of new offices, make a turnpike, or anything they like. Promises cost nothing, therefore deny nobody who has a vote or sufficient influence to obtain one.

"Get up on all occasions, and sometimes on no occasion at all, and make long-winded speeches, though composed of nothing else than wind."

 Crockett's career in the House of Representatives can be followed through the journals of that body. The records of the United States House of Representatives for Monday, January 31, 1831, show Crockett attempting to protect the rights of some members of the Cherokee Nation:

"Mr. Crockett presented a petition of three citizens of the Cherokee nation of Indians, by W. S. Coodey, their agent, stating, that, by treaties concluded between the United States and said Cherokee nation in the years 1817 and 1819, the petitioners became entitled each to a reservation of 640 acres of land, that they were forcibly dispossessed of said land by white men, that they sued out writs of ejectment, but from poverty were unable to prosecute said writs, and that judgments have gone against them by default; and praying indemnity for their losses from the Government of the United States."

H.R. Journal—Monday, January 31, 1831, available on the EDSITEment resource <u>American Memory</u> by searching for the entry date.



- The records of the United States House of Representatives for Tuesday, December 17, 1833, show Crockett's effort to pass a bill granting land to squatters in Tennessee (H.R. Journal), available on the EDSITEment resource <u>American Memory</u> by searching for the entry date.
- The records of the United States House of Representatives for Monday, January 19, 1829, show Crockett attempting to raise funds for public education in Tennessee:

"Mr. Crockett presented a petition of inhabitants of the Western District of Tennessee, praying that the lands lying within said district, and belonging to the United States, may be given for the support of common schools within the same."

H.R. Journal—January 19, 1829, available on the EDSITEment resource <u>American Memory</u> by searching for the entry date.

 Bear Hunting in Tennessee, an excerpt from Narrative of the Life of David Crockett of the State of Tennessee by David Crockett, 1834 (edited by Angel Price, 1996), available through the Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library, a link from the EDSITEment resource Center for the Liberal Arts. (NOTE: Though this particular narrative is said to be the most likely to have been written, all or in part, by Crockett himself, that does not make it true.)

Have your students look at the entire text, or this excerpt:

When I got up the hill, I found I had passed the dogs; and so I turned and went to them. I found, when I got there, they had treed the bear in a large forked poplar, and it was setting in the fork.

I could see the lump, but not plain enough to shoot with any certainty, as there was no moonlight; and so I set in to hunting for some dry brush to make me a light; but I could find none, though I could find that the ground was torn mightily to pieces by the cracks.

At last I thought I could shoot by guess, and kill him; so I pointed as near the lump as I could, and fired away. But the bear didn't come, he only clomb up higher, and got out on a limb, which helped me to see him better. I now loaded up again and fired, but this time he didn't move at all. I commenced loading for a third fire, but the first thing I knowed, the bear was down among my dogs, and they were fighting all around me. I had my big butcher in my belt, and I had a pair of dressed buckskin breeches on. So I took out my knife, and stood, determined, if he should get hold of me, to defend myself in the best way I could.

• Remember the Alamo, by Amelia E. Barr, available through the Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library, a link from the EDSITEment resource The Internet Public Library. Here, in a work from 1888, we read account that features the familiar image of the heroic Crockett:

"At last, at the hour of ten, the outer wall was gained. Then, room by room was taken with slaughter incredible. There were fourteen Americans in the hospital. They fired their rifles and pistols from their pallets with such deadly aim that Milagros turned a cannon... upon them... at the entrance of the door they left forty dead Mexicans."

"Ah Señor, Señor! tell me no more. My heart can not endure it."



"Mi madre," answered Isabel, "we must hear it all. Without it, one cannot learn to hate Santa Anna sufficiently"; and her small, white teeth snapped savagely, as she touched the hand of Lopez with an imperative "Proceed."

"Colonel Bowie was helpless in bed. Two Mexican officers fired at him, and one ran forward to stab him ere he died. The dying man caught his murderer by the hair of his head, and plunged his knife into his heart. They went to judgment at the same moment."

"I am glad of it! Glad of it! The American would say to the Almighty: 'Thou gavest me life, and thou gavest me freedom; freedom, that is the nobler gift of the two. This man robbed me of both.' And God is just. The Judge of the whole earth will do right."

"At noon, only six of the one hundred and eighty-three were left alive. They were surrounded by Castrillon and his soldiers. Xavier says his general was penetrated with admiration for these heroes. He spoke sympathizingly to Crockett, who stood in an angle of the fort, with his shattered rifle in his right hand, and his massive knife... in his left. His face was gashed, his white hair crimson with blood; but a score of Mexicans, dead and dying, were around him. At his side was Travis, but so exhausted that he was scarcely alive.

"Castrillon could not kill these heroes. He asked their lives of Santa Anna, who stood with a scowling, savage face in this last citadel of his foes. For answer, he turned to the men around him, and said, with a malignant emphasis: 'Fire!' It was the last volley. Of the defenders of the Alamo, not one is left."

LESSON 3

A Million More Tall Tales

Okay, a million is an exaggeration, but there are many tall tales the class can analyze for comparison. Stories about Johnny Appleseed or Mike Fink (such as those from the Stoutenberg book) are fruitful for comparison because both Appleseed (nee John Chapman) and Fink were historical figures. It would also be productive to share a tale about a completely fictional character such as Pecos Bill. Use the opportunity to help students distinguish between the fictional and factual elements of these tales. Though Pecos Bill probably did not exist as an individual, elements of his tales (e.g., the Grand Canyon, barbed wire) are real.

Why would an author want such fantastical stories to contain factual elements?

Read one or more additional tall tales to the class or have the students read them. What similarities do students note between these tales and the Crockett tale? Does the class need to refine its list of tall tale characteristics?

Do the students enjoy these stories? Why?

LESSON A

Spinning Some New Yarns

The unit culminates with students creating their own tall tales in either a pioneer or contemporary setting. A tale set in the present time would be particularly relevant, as we are presently undergoing rapid technological change, and an era about which many people are nostalgic—the 20th century—has recently ended.

Begin by having the students summarize what they have learned. What are the



qualities of a tall tale? What various reasons might people have had for wanting to "stretch the truth" in tales of historical figures of the frontier? What values do the tales reflect? Is the class list of tall tale qualities sufficiently refined?

Tell the students that though there are many tall tales, there is still room to expand the genre, particularly with tales about the late 20th century and tales with female heroes.

Students interested in writing a tale about the late 20th century should think about what is being lost in the technological revolution our country is undergoing. What ways of life or occupations are threatened by modern technology? For example, today, factory work is threatened by automation and the change to an information society. (There is a precedent: Joe Magarac, a tall tale hero, was a steelworker.) However, most sports figures would *not* work as tall tale heroes because their profession is not similarly threatened.

Students interested in creating tales with female heroes from history can read about some courageous women in the article <u>Heroic Women</u>, available on <u>RootsWeb</u>, a link from the EDSITEment-reviewed website <u>Women of the West Museum</u>.

Using a rubric designed with your specific goals will help your students understand what is expected and how they are being evaluated. Go over the standards as students get started.

To be completely effective, a rubric should be designed for your class with your curriculum, the students' skill level and the specific assignment in mind. The following is provided as a sample to use when designing your own. <u>Click here</u> to download the rubric in rich-text format.

Name:	Exemplary	Very Good	Satisfactory	Needs Revision
Structure:				
Beginning:	Reader becomes involved in the story and wants to read on.	Good attempt at getting the reader's attention.	Situation clear to reader, some attempt to get reader's attention.	Situation unclear to reader after the opening.
Middle:	Character learns and grows as intriguing problems are dealt with though not necessarily solved.	Character works to solve problems using his/her skills.	Character is given problems to solve but solutions may be pat.	Character is given insufficient problems to solve.
End:	Seamless ending helps the author communicate the theme of wishing for	Ending smoothly completes the tale.	Sufficient ending.	Insufficient or no clear ending.



	"the good old days."			
Content: Includes some, or all, of the following: Exaggeration, character's origin, hero with extraordinary abilities, actual locations, historic characters, humor, theme of wishing for "the good old days."	Tall tale content helps the writer create an intriguing tall tale hero and sheds light on the predicament and personality of the main character.	Tall tale content is woven smoothly into the plot.	Sufficient tall tale content.	Insufficient tall tale content.
Grammar, Usage, Mechanics, Spelling	Virtually perfect GUMS.	Some errors, but mostly in areas not emphasized in class lessons.	Some errors in areas covered in class lessons, but not enough to prevent understanding.	Errors interfere with the ability of the nomination to be understood.
Overall Evaluation:	Comments:			
O Exemplary O Very Good O Good O Needs Revision				

NOTE: Exemplary papers have all the positive characteristics of very good papers.

During the time period when students are working on their stories, read tall tales aloud to the class every day. Encourage students to share their stories when they are completed. Consider ways to publish your students' original stories—from creating a tall tale book for distribution in your school to posting them on your school's website or submitting them to other children's websites.

Extending the Lesson

- Students may wish to investigate other tall tale heroes who weren't covered in class. Are these characters based on historical figures? What realities of American history and geography do the tales reflect?
- Students may want to examine the following additional historical documents (or others that can be found online) related to David Crockett:



"Credential of election for David Crockett," available through <u>NAIL</u> on the EDSITEment-reviewed website <u>The Digital Classroom</u> by searching for the exact title.

A Picture of David Crockett, available through the Library of Congress, a link from the EDSITEment resource American Memory.

Crockett's record in Congress: The EDSITEment resource <u>American Memory</u> maintains complete Congressional records; therefore, a search for "Crockett" will reveal many actions Crockett took, such as The Congressional Globe, House of Representatives, 25th Congress, 1st Session, Pages 310 through 311, Authorize the issue of Treasury Notes—Mr. Crockett.

A Picture of Crockett, available on Encarta, a link from the EDSITEment resource The Internet Public Library.

<u>Crockett Almanac cover photo</u>, available on the official website of the state of Tennessee, a link from the EDSITEment resource <u>The Internet Public Library</u>.

 David Crockett did die at the Alamo but, since most or all of the Alamo's defenders perished (there were survivors who did not participate in the battle), it has been difficult for historians to confirm the specific fate of any defender. Scholarly debate over the death of Crockett remains lively today. Students interested in the matter can consult the following:

<u>Background on the Alamo</u>, available on <u>America's Library</u>, a link from the EDSITEment resource <u>American Memory</u>.

<u>The Alamo: Thirteen Days of Glory</u>, available through a link from the EDSITEment-reviewed website <u>Center for the Liberal Arts</u>.

<u>Texans buy controversial diary that challenges Alamo legend</u>, available on <u>CNN Online</u>, a news and current events link from the EDSITEment resource The Internet Public Library.

"Thomas Ricks Lindley and Dr. James E. Crisp square off in a six-part debate on the authenticity of the José de la Peña diary," from Alamo de Parras, a link from the CNN Online article, noted above.

 Completing the activities in the complementary NEH lesson, "It's a Myth," students explore the characteristics of myth while reading and exploring some representative stories.

■ Links to EDSITEment Participating Websites

American Memory http://memory.loc.gov/

<u>Center for the Liberal Arts</u> http://www.virginia.edu/~libarts/home.html

<u>Digital Classroom</u> http://www.nara.gov/education/classrm.html

<u>History Matters</u> http://historymatters.gmu.edu/

The Internet Public Library



http://www.ipl.org

Women of the West Museum http://www.wowmuseum.org

Other Resources

Websites:

- America's Library
- David Crockett: His Life and Adventures

Books:

- Kellog, Steven. *Mike Fink*. Paperback (May 1998) William Morrow & Company. Reading level: Young audiences.
- Kellog, Steven. Sally Ann Thunder Ann Whirlwind Crockett: A Tall Tale.
 Paperback (August 1999) William Morrow & Company. Reading level:
 Young audiences.
- Santrey, Laurence. *Davy Crockett*. Troll, 1983. Reading level: Young audiences.
- Stoutenberg, Adrien. *American Tall Tales*. Paperback, 112 pages (October 1976) Puffin Books; ISBN: 0140309284. Reading level: Young adult.

Book on Cassette:

 Moore, John Trotwood. "Hearts of Hickory: A Story of Andrew Jackson and the War of 1812." From The Library of Congress's "Talking Book Topics," a newsletter of books on cassette (RC 44089). Read by Jack Fox / 3 cassettes. Audience: Adult.

Video:

 "Rabbit Ears—The Story of Pecos Bill" (1988). Featuring Robin Williams. Columbia/Tristar Studios, August 22, 1997. NTSC format (U.S. and Canada only). Color, HiFi Sound. ASIN: B0000048J9.





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